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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000245

NOFORN
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/11/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN'S ELECTION: URBAN VOTERS MOBILIZING TO OUST
AHMADINEJAD

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: The overwhelming last-minute mobilization of the urban vote will likely lead to President Ahmadinejad's defeat, as many Iranians who typically stay home on election day now view Friday's election as a rare chance to exert some influence over the direction of their country. IRPO contacts and a growing body of analysis now predict that even if Mousavi cannot take the election in the first round on June 12, he will almost certainly defeat Ahmadinejad in a two-man race a week later. Ahmadinejad retains support in the provinces and key institutions such as the Basij, but his ability to manipulate the vote will likely be constrained by high voter turnout and the advocacy of senior establishment power-brokers determined to prevent Ahmadinejad's re-election. Rafsanjani's "warning" to the Supreme Leader that an Ahmadinejad victory could undermine the Islamic Republic itself, while undoubtedly self-serving, is also likely true. Ahmadinejad, a polarizing figure within Iran long before this heated campaign season, has become a virtual lightning rod. Neither his supporters nor his many opponents will take defeat at the polls well. End summary.

Mousavi Surges Ahead

12. (S/NF) There is growing consensus among Iranian political analysts and IRPO contacts that Mir Hossein Mousavi will win Iran's tenth presidential election on June 12, either in the first round or after a run-off with President Ahmadinejad on June 19. Though Ahmadinejad retains his core support in the provinces, the shift in conventional wisdom follows a week of voter mobilization in Tehran and other cities, overwhelmingly in favor of Mousavi. Many IRPO contacts are invoking the 1979 Islamic Revolution to describe the level of excitement and engagement of Iranian society this week, and most of our interlocutors are now predicting participation levels of 70 or even 80 percent, similar to the turnout that swept Khatami into office in 1997.

13. (S/NF) Two other candidates, the reformist Mehdi Karroubi and the conservative Mohsen Rezai, remain in the race; Karroubi is expected to draw votes from both Mousavi and Ahmadinejad while Rezai, a co-founder of the Revolutionary Guards, will primarily

take Ahmadinejad voters. In the event of a run-off between the top two candidates, Mousavi will likely benefit from growing disenchantment with Ahmadinejad following a polarizing campaign period.

The Fraud Factor

14. (S/NF) The level of fraud remains a key factor in determining the outcome of the race; however, there are signs that Ahmadinejad's ability to cheat may have been eroded over recent days. In particular, the predicted large turnout will be a significant check against the effects of fraud. In addition, it is clear that there will be intense scrutiny of the process, both by Ahmadinejad's electoral opponents as well as by the senior establishment figures he publicly branded as corrupt during the now-famous televised debate with Mousavi and subsequent campaign events.

15. (S/NF) Public awareness of the potential for fraud is also very high: a leading chant by Mousavi supporters captures the sentiment: "if there is no cheating, Mousavi will be president; if there is cheating, there will be a riot." (Note: It rhymes in Farsi.) A letter from Ministry of Interior employees alleging that radical Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi explicitly sanctioned changing votes in favor of Ahmadinejad and outlining the potential ways in which the Ahmadinejad campaign could cheat has circulated widely among Iranians.

16. (S/NF) Similarly, Rafsanjani's open letter to the Supreme Leader asking him to take "effective measures" to counter Ahmadinejad's "lies" or risk losing the "system's credibility

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and the sympathy of the people" has run in numerous media outlets inside Iran. The letter was followed by news reports today of a three-hour meeting between Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani is quoted as describing the encounter as "one of my most productive meetings with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution," an indication he believes Khamenei has taken on board the potential consequences of an overtly fraudulent win by Ahmadinejad. Earlier today the Mousavi camp also leaked a letter from the candidate to Khamenei in which he referenced "reports indicating that a number of Guards and Basij have been interfering in the election" and noting the "concerns of the people" about such activities.

Either Likely Scenario Could Spark Unrest

17. (S/NF) Similar to the campaign period itself, which has been punctuated by personal attacks and the massive mobilization of voters across Iran's fractured society, the outcome of the election is likely to be polarizing. Either of the probable outcomes - a Mousavi win in the first or second round, or the re-election of Ahmadinejad tainted by the perception of fraud - will, at a minimum, spark a struggle over verification of the results. There are signs that both camps are setting the scene to contest the results, with Ahmadinejad supporters also alleging malfeasance by his opponents' camps and laying down unrealistically high bench marks of the number of votes Ahmadinejad should in a fair contest. Social unrest is also possible given the conviction among large swaths of society now that Ahmadinejad can not win fairly; conversely, Ahmadinejad has portrayed himself as a champion of disenfranchised Iranians and a potential martyr at the hands of a corrupt establishment. His

supporters are not likely to take defeat well.

18. (S/NF) Comment: Though strong anecdotal evidence supports an eventual Mousavi win, the depth of Ahmadinejad's reservoir of support among rural and working class voters, as well as the role of the Revolutionary Guards, remain open questions. Supreme Leader Khamenei will no doubt play a key role in determining the transparency of this election and managing the political fall-out once the results are in. The importance he and other leaders attach to the credibility of this election - which they view as an endorsement of the system by the people - likely trumps his personal preference for a particular candidate.
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